

Waioli Mission House
Hanalei
Kauai County
Hawaii

HABS No. HI-53

HABS
HI,
4-HANLEI,
4-

PHOTOGRAPHS

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

HABS
HI,
4-HANLI,
4-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

WAIOLI MISSION HOUSE

HABS No. HI-53

Location: Hanalei, Kauai County, Hawaii

Owner: Waioli Mission, Inc.

Occupant: None.

Use: Museum.

HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

The Waioli Mission was founded in 1834 by Rev. William P. Alexander, who brought with him to Hanalei, his wife and son, William. Governor Kaikioewa, ruling chief of the island, had granted land and the Hawaiians constructed a grass house for them in which they lived for three years. A more substantial shelter was a real necessity in this region of torrential downpours and excessive dampness, Mr. Alexander was soon corresponding with the American Board in Boston and with the Mission agent in Honolulu regarding a more permanent dwelling. At first he planned a stone house, to be built with coral blocks from the shore. This, however, was a new type of work for Hanalei Hawaiians and stormy weather frequently interrupted the slow process of cutting out blocks from the sandstone ledge four miles along the coast, and ferrying them by canoe to Hanalei beach. In October of 1835 Alexander reported that only 150 stones had been cut, and none delivered. Since 2,000 stones were needed for the house, he had finally to abandon the project. The 150 blocks were later used for the foundations, front steps, and fireplace of the frame house now planned. Early in 1836 Alexander wrote that timbers could be secured from the mountains. Laths also were cut locally and plaster was made from coral rock. By the end of January 1837, Alexander reported that "the roof is on and the new carpenters drive ahead;" in another month, "the floors are laid;" and on April 1st, "the house is finished as far as now possible." He later estimated the cost to be \$2,000. Mary Charlotte Alexander, in her book, William Patterson Alexander, sums up the almost insurmountable difficulties encountered in building this Waioli house.

"...The house, a roomy two-story frame house with a separate cook house, seems to have taken a year in the building. The frame was hewn 'out of the green mountains at whose base we live.' In experience in estimating quantity of material needed and the irregular calls of boats occasioned delay. One boat even brought lumber and went away without unloading it. After the roofing began (with zinc plates), Mr. Alexander found himself fifty sheets short and begs that they be sent up. Besides two carpenters at work to whom he paid \$45 a month each besides board, he had two Hawaiians hewing and two sawing, whom he paid in cloth, and a 'Northwest Indian' who did the painting. Of the two who begin the work, one is laid up a month with delirium tremens and the other is dismissed as too slow, but two new carpenters 'drive on well.'"

Miss Alexander tells of her grandfather's terming his new home his "zinc palace," and quotes also from a letter written by him to his brother James in Kentucky late in 1839, which, with the addition of later memories, gives a good picture of the home. In the tropical garden were fruit trees such as mulberries, guavas, figs, coffee, breadfruit, and spreading kukui trees were closer to the house. The living room was not considered a large room by Miss Alexander but she felt that a sense of space was given by its fine proportions and white, plastered walls; its two wooden mantels and small-paned windows. Behind the living room was the parents' bedroom, with a child's room adjoining. Steep stairs lead to the two rooms above, one used as a sleeping-room for visitors: "the room of the traveling prophet," as Mr. Alexander termed it, and one serving as his own study. The cook house was a separate building in the yard. Its sandstone chimney, according to tradition, was laid up by Mr. Alexander himself.

In early 1840, Alexander added a dining room and pantry wing between the main house and the cook house. Clapboards on the present inner east wall of the kitchen indicate that the main building ended there at one time and that the cook house, rebuilt later that same year, was joined to it at that time.

For health reasons the Alexanders left Waioli in December 1842. Rev. George B. Rowell and family then occupied the Waioli house from 1843 to 1846. In this short time they added the back veranda, restored sills on two sides of the house, and made other minor repairs. When Mr. Rowell was transferred to Waimea, Mr. Johnson, who had arrived in 1837 to assist in the Station school, was ordained and took over pastoral duties, and Mr. Abner Wilcox took charge of the school. Mr. Wilcox and his family occupied the Mission House.

One of the great difficulties was in securing appropriations from the Mission for keeping this Board-owned property in serviceable condition, especially as funds decreased, and as the American Board was withdrawing its support during the 1850's. A lean-to for Mr. Wilcox's growing family was added at the back of the house, and at that time the exposed wall, which leaked badly in north-east gales, was finally rendered weather-proof by heavy shingling. The dining room floor, of koa, had warped, and was removed for use on the back veranda. A pine floor was laid in its place in the dining room. By 1854 Mr. Wilcox asked for a shingle roof, which was installed in 1858, to replace the zinc plates of the main house and the thatched roof of the dining room-kitchen wing. The following summer, the front veranda was rebuilt at Mr. Wilcox's own expense; in fact from that time on most of the restoration was carried on by him or by his sons.

The major change came in 1859-1860 when Edward, Wilcox's son, who had a talent for carpentering, added a bedroom over the dining room, extended the upper veranda and connected it by an outside stairway with the porch below. This added greatly to the space and comfort of the house.

When, in 1861-1863, the American Board finally transferred the Sandwich Islands Mission to the Hawaiian Evangelical Association, mission lands were divided among the remaining missionaries as parts of the pensions paid to them. In this way the Waioli Mission House was finally deeded to Abner

Wilcox. Following the untimely death of both Abner and Lucy Wilcox while on a visit back to Connecticut in 1869, it passed to their sons. Albert was the last to leave it, moving out in 1877. Members of the family continued to visit the old home occasionally and George Wilcox, attempting to keep it in repair, added a galvanized roof in 1883. It was adjoining mission lands were sold to three daughters of Samuel Whitney Wilcox. These three sisters undertook extensive restoration of the house in 1921. The work was under the direction of Hart Wood, a Honolulu architect. Many of the old Hawaiian timbers had to be replaced, some clapboards renewed. Replastering throughout the house was done, a shingle roof put on, and plumbing installed. The lean-to at the back was removed, restoring the house to its former appearance, and the child's room on the first floor was made into a bathroom and adjoining closet. With the dull gray and green colors restored in the trim in the rooms, and the exterior repainted white, the house then presented much the same general appearance as it had during its occupation by the Mission families. Furnished with plain pieces of the early missionary period, some of them family heirlooms, the house is now open daily to the public as a memorial to the early missionaries.

REFERENCE

Extracted from: A Record of the Descendants of Abner Wilcox and Lucy Eliza Hart Wilcox of Hawaii, 1836-1950, compiled by Elsie Hart Wilcox. Honolulu, Hawaii, 1950.

Prepared by: Mrs. Sophie J. Cluff, Librarian, Wilcox Library.